

## A Group Exercise to Help with the Development of Strategies\*

This exercise is designed to facilitate a group process to begin to develop strategies to respond to priority gaps identified in the Continuum of Care system.

1. Have a person write down the major gaps identified through the earlier processes. There should be between 10-20 gaps. If there are more, and they are not yet prioritized, determine the top 4-5 gaps in each element identified. These major gaps should then be transcribed in short phrases: "mental health counseling," "transitional housing for families," "outreach to youth and people with mental illness," and so on, and should then be written in felt pen on 8x10 pieces of paper (linkage cards). (NOTE 1: To speed the process, have an individual prepare the cards as decisions on each of the elements are completed so that the cards are ready at the beginning of this step.)
2. Spread the linkage cards out on a large table (or tables) so that the participants can see them and move them around the table freely. Have extra paper available to make duplicates when needed. Invite participants to gather around the table to view the cards.
3. Ask the participants to consider the connections between the various gaps. Ask them to look at how they might be linked and to place them in logical piles. For instance, "Mental Health Counseling", "Outreach to Youth and the Mentally Ill" and "Permanent Housing for the Chronically Mentally Ill" are well related. Some cards cannot easily be placed with others and may stand alone. Others might need to be split (i.e., "Outreach to Youth and the Mentally Ill" could be split into outreach to youth and outreach to the mentally ill) or duplicated so that they may be placed in more than one pile. Allow time for everyone to become comfortable with the groupings and to discuss possible rearrangements. These piles represent the first step in designing long-term (5-10 year) strategies.
4. Depending upon how much time remains in the meeting and how many piles there are (try to keep the number of piles below 10), divide the participants into small groups of 3-6 persons, including those who are knowledgeable about the particular subject matter. Ask them to take a pile and draft a proposed Long-Range Strategy Statement to address the gaps identified. Ask them not to be constrained by funding considerations at this point and to also think in terms of strategies that do not involve funding. The Long-Range Strategy Statement may consist of a broad description of the strategy and individual bullets describing the concept. If appropriate, identify in the statement who is targeted, what type of housing or services are involved, any inter-related aspects and any location issues. The form of the statement is not important. The goal is to describe the basic concept so that the Core Working Group may draft a more complete strategy statement for review at the next meeting.

NOTE: In the development of both strategies and action steps, be certain that the participants are not just focused on projects and activities that require financial assistance. Many strategies developed by communities do not entail any financial assistance. These may include changes in policies, procedures, and reallocation of existing resources, program changes, and so on. For example, a change in the program may include modifying the length of stay in a shelter, setting aside units for a particular sub-group within an existing facility, or developing cooperative links with employment training resources.

\*(Adapted from the Guidebook for Developing Local Continuum of Care Plans for Homeless People, Low Income Housing Institute, December 1996.)